

# COVID-19: Guidance for K-12 Schools from the Wyoming Department of Health

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May 21, 2021

## Background

Beginning June 1, 2021, statewide public health orders will no longer be in effect. **Moving forward, unless circumstances warrant additional statewide or local orders, specific protocols for the safe operation of K-12 schools during the pandemic will be determined at the school district level.** This document provides recommendations from the Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) to prevent transmission of COVID-19 in K-12 schools. These recommendations are based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with adaptations based on Wyoming's experience during the 2020-2021 school year. WDH encourages school officials to consult with their county health officers to develop protocols appropriate for each specific school district.

As the number of individuals who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 continues to increase, and as vaccines become available to additional age groups, it is likely that recommendations for K-12 schools will change over the course of the summer and the 2021-2022 school year. WDH will update this guidance accordingly. The current guidance reflects the fact that, at this time, most students have not had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. People are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 when at least 2 weeks have passed after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or when at least 2 weeks have passed after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Johnson & Johnson [J&J]/Janssen). There is currently no post-vaccination time limit on fully vaccinated status.

The recommendations from the WDH involve six core prevention strategies. These strategies include the following:

1. Vaccination against COVID-19
2. Physical distancing
3. Use of face coverings
4. Contact tracing, in combination with isolation and quarantine
5. Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
6. Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities

In addition, WDH offers resources for diagnostic and screening testing of students and staff. Additional information on testing resources will be published shortly on this page:

<https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-orders-and-guidance/>

## Metrics

WDH has developed metrics that indicate the level of COVID-19 spread on both a statewide and county level. **K-12 schools are encouraged to monitor these metrics on a county basis and consult with county health officials on appropriate adaptations to prevention measures based on levels of transmission.** During the 2020-2021 school year in Wyoming, K-12 schools were able to operate in-person using basic public health prevention measures even when transmission levels were extremely high in their communities; therefore, the WDH does not recommend moving to hybrid or online learning models based solely on the level of transmission in the surrounding community. However, adaptation of public health measures based on specific school circumstances at very high or very low levels of community transmission may be necessary or appropriate.



An explanation of the metrics along with metrics updated on a weekly basis can be found on this page, under the heading “Wyoming COVID-19 County Transmission Indicators”:

<https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-orders-and-guidance/>.

In addition, all information needed to determine the metrics on a daily basis (M-F) are available on the state and county dashboards:

<https://health.wyo.gov/publichealth/infectious-disease-epidemiology-unit/disease/novel-coronavirus/covid-19-orders-and-guidance/>

## **Core Prevention Strategy One: COVID-19 Vaccination**

Vaccination against COVID-19 is the most effective way to prevent illness and spread in any setting. At this time there are three vaccines authorized for adults 18 years and older (Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson/Janssen). The Pfizer vaccine is also authorized for children ages 12 to 17 years. Vaccines are in abundant supply and are available in multiple locations in each county, including public health nursing offices and health departments, provider offices, and pharmacies.

The WDH encourages K-12 schools to work with their county public health nursing offices or health departments to ensure vaccines are accessible to all eligible students as well as all staff who have not yet been immunized.

At this time, because most K-12 students have not had the opportunity to be fully immunized against COVID-19, the public health prevention strategies listed below remain important. However, it is likely that guidance will be adapted as more students have the opportunity to become fully immunized against COVID-19.

## **Core Prevention Strategy Two: Physical Distancing**

WDH recommends continuing physical distancing strategies previously included in the statewide public health orders both within school facilities and during transportation.

Six feet of separation between individuals should be maintained as much as possible, with the following exceptions:

- When students are wearing face coverings, 3 feet of separation between students is adequate in most settings. Schools should try to maintain 3 feet of separation between students wearing face coverings.
- Middle schools and high schools should consider separating students wearing face coverings by more than 3 feet if possible in counties with high transmission levels if that can be done while still offering in-person instruction to all students (see [color-coded data measures for each Wyoming county](#)).
- Three feet of separation in K-12 schools applies to students wearing face coverings only; 6 feet of separation should still be maintained as much as possible between adults (school staff) and students, and between individual adults. Six feet of separation should also be maintained as much as possible between students when masks cannot be worn, such as when eating.
- Fully immunized staff members do not need to wear face coverings or practice physical distancing when gathering when other fully immunized staff members (for example, in break rooms or staff meetings). Fully immunized staff should continue to wear face coverings when around students, and unimmunized staff should continue to wear face coverings and physically distance from others at all times.

Additional strategies to maximize physical distancing include the following:

- Cohort students into groups and limit contact between cohorts.



- Face desks in the same direction

While there are no longer limitations on the number of individuals who can attend large events, WDH recommends schools continue to implement physical distancing between groups of spectators to the extent possible, especially during indoor events. This may include limiting the number of spectators attending an event, especially in areas with high transmission levels.

Both WDH and CDC recommend the use of physical distancing at this time in K-12 settings regardless of community transmission levels. However, during the 2020-2021 school year, some Wyoming schools in counties with sustained low transmission levels according to WDH metrics (light green zone or dark green zone for at least two weeks) made physical distancing optional. Schools should consult with local health officials if considering making physical distancing optional.

### Core Prevention Strategy Three: Face Coverings

The WDH recommends continuing the use of face coverings as previously included in the statewide public health orders.

The WDH recommends that students, teachers, school staff, and visitors (including parents, families, and members of the public) wear face coverings indoors in situations where 6 feet of separation cannot be maintained. This includes both within school facilities and during transportation. Face coverings should be made of cloth, fabric, or other soft, air-permeable material, without holes, that covers the nose and mouth and surrounding areas of the lower face.

In most situations, face coverings are not necessary outdoors. However, schools can consider recommending face covering use at crowded outdoor events involving individuals from multiple households.

Schools should not require individuals who meet the following criteria to wear a face covering:

- Children who are younger than three years of age.
- Individuals with a medical condition, mental health condition, or disability that prevents wearing a face covering, including an individual with a medical condition for whom wearing a face covering could cause harm or dangerously obstruct breathing; K-12 schools should require documentation from the student's parent/guardian, or the student's medical provider, that the student meets this exception.
  - At the school district's discretion, documentation can be either from a parent/guardian or from a medical provider. If a school district so chooses, it can require that the documentation come from a medical provider.
  - For purposes of determining whether the request falls within this exception, school districts may determine the level of explanation they will require as to the reason for the request.
- Individuals who are unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove a face covering without assistance.
- Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing while communicating with others, or individuals who are communicating with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication, in which case it is recommended that a face shield or alternative protection such as a plexiglass barrier be used (a face shield is a personal protective equipment device which protects the person's entire face from potentially infectious materials).
- Individuals who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, that would necessitate exempting the individual from wearing a face covering.
- Children for whom a face covering may interfere with the ability to effectively participate in educational activities or may increase the risk of disease transmission because of increased hand to face contact.
  - Exceptions under this provision may include, by way of example but are not limited to, students who are actively engaged in playing an instrument or students whose behaviors are negatively affected by wearing a face covering for long periods of time.

- Requests made under this provision are subject to school district approval. For purposes of determining whether the request falls within this exception, school districts may determine the level of explanation they will require as to the reason for the request.
- Individuals engaged in athletic activities or performances.
- When an individual is eating or drinking.

Both WDH and CDC recommend the use of face coverings at this time in K-12 settings regardless of community transmission levels. However, during the 2020-2021 school year, some Wyoming schools in counties with sustained low transmission levels according to WDH metrics (light green zone or dark green zone for at least two weeks) made face coverings optional. Schools should consult with local health officials if considering making face coverings optional.

## **Core Prevention Strategy Four: Contact Tracing, Isolation, and Quarantine**

The WDH recommends continuing contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine as previously included in the statewide public health orders. Schools should work with local health officials to conduct contact tracing and determine isolation and quarantine requirements.

Individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 should be excluded from school according to this flowchart:

<https://health.wyo.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/School-COVID-19-Exclusion-Flowchart.pdf>

Individuals who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 will be issued an isolation order from WDH and must remain out of school until they have met the criteria for release from isolation, which are as follows:

- Individuals with symptoms must remain in isolation until they have been afebrile for at least 24 hours, their other symptoms are improving, and it has been at least 10 days since the onset of symptoms.
- Individuals without symptoms must remain in isolation until it has been 10 days since their first positive test was collected.

Individuals who have been identified as a close contact of a person with COVID-19 should remain out of school until they have met criteria for release from quarantine (below). A close contact is defined as a person who has been within 6 feet of a person with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more in a 24 hour period, starting 2 days before the positive test or 2 days before the onset of symptoms. A close contact may also be someone who provided care at home to someone who was sick with COVID-19 or someone who had direct physical contact (touching/hugging/kissing) with an infected person and/or a person with whom the infected person shared drinking or eating utensils.

When potential exposure occurs within K-12 settings, the use of face coverings is considered when identifying close contacts as described below and according to this infographic:

<https://health.wyo.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/wdh-K12-isolation-graphic-9-2020.pdf>

- If the case and close contacts are wearing face coverings, the case must be isolated and the close contacts should be instructed to self-monitor. Self-monitoring entails close monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms over the subsequent 14 days, staying home if any symptoms develop, and speaking with a healthcare provider about COVID-19 testing in the case of any illness. If people who are undergoing self-monitoring become ill but do not get tested, they should remain home until 10 days after symptom onset.

- If the case is wearing a face covering, but some close contacts are not, those close contacts not wearing face coverings must be quarantined. Close contacts wearing face coverings do not need to be quarantined. The case must be isolated.
- If the case is not wearing a face covering, close contacts must be quarantined whether or not close contacts are wearing face covering. The case must be isolated.

**Individuals who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 do not need to quarantine after an exposure.**

While WDH recommends a 14-day quarantine period after an exposure to COVID-19 as the best way to prevent further transmission of COVID-19, WDH does allow shortened quarantine periods. Schools can choose to stay with the 14-day quarantine period or adopt one or both of the shortened quarantine options, which are the following:

- A quarantine period of 10 days following the exposure, if the exposed person remains asymptomatic.
- A quarantine period of 7 days with a negative PCR test on day 5 or later if the exposed person remains asymptomatic.

### **Core Prevention Strategy Five: Handwashing and Respiratory Etiquette**

Schools should teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If handwashing is not possible, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be used.

Schools should encourage students to cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue when not wearing a face covering and immediately wash their hands after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Schools should provide adequate supplies for handwashing and respiratory etiquette such as soap, towels or hand dryers, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and tissues.

### **Core Prevention Strategy Six: Cleaning and Maintaining Healthy Facilities**

Improve ventilation to the extent possible to increase circulation of outdoor air, increase the delivery of clean air, and dilute potential contaminants. Strategies to improve ventilation include the following:

- Bring in as much outdoor air as possible
- Ensure Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) settings are maximizing ventilation
- Filter and/or clean the air in the school by improving the level of filtration as much as possible
- Use exhaust fans in restrooms and kitchens
- Open windows in buses and other transportation, if doing so does not pose a safety risk. Even just cracking windows open a few inches improves air circulation.

While current data indicate that the primary mode of COVID-19 transmission is person-to-person, routine cleaning of high-touch surfaces and objects such as door handles, sink handles, toilets, and drinking fountains, is an effective way to prevent the spread of many diseases. Further details about cleaning and disinfection from CDC can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/clean-disinfect-hygiene.html>

**More resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for K-12 schools can be found at**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>.

**For more information about the COVID-19 outbreak please visit: [health.wyo.gov](https://health.wyo.gov) or [cdc.gov](https://cdc.gov).**

